

## **Newton Board of Aldermen**

### **President's Report January 2006**

#### **1. Introduction.**

Colleagues in government and fellow citizens:

I am honored to offer to you my second Annual Report as President of the Newton Board of Aldermen. What I am about to say is not news to the members of the Board or many of our guests, but many Newton citizens who watch these proceedings may not fully understand the important role the Board plays in City Government and the many actions we take that affect the quality of life in Newton. Therefore, the purpose of this Report is to

- inform citizens about the Board's role and describe some of what the Board has done in the last year;
- highlight some issues which the Board of Aldermen will take up this coming year; and
- acknowledge some of the many valued colleagues in City government who help the Board do its work.

(I also anticipate placing a copy of the Report on the City's aldermanic web page, which can be accessed by going to <<http://www.ci.newton.ma.us>>.)

#### **2. Background on the Newton Board of Aldermen.**

While the Mayor is the Chief Executive of the City, it is worth remembering that the City Charter provides that "...Except as otherwise provided by law or the Charter, all powers of the City shall be vested in the Board of Aldermen...." The Board President also serves as Acting Mayor when the Mayor is unavailable.

So how has the Board exercised its powers during the last year? I will outline that in a moment, but first I want to acknowledge the work of my colleagues in the Board leadership and staff.

##### **a. The Vice-President.**

The Vice-President serves in the absence of the President, but also does other things. For example, Vice-President **Amy Sangiolo** has worked on enhancing the aldermanic web site and the availability of key documents on line; helped organize holiday and other Board events; ably presided over the Board meetings when the President served as Acting Mayor; and been the principal liaison with the staff of the Clerk of the Board.

### **b. The President Emeritus.**

The President Emeritus presides when the Vice-President is unavailable, and also undertakes other tasks, which the President may request. For example, during the last year President Emeritus **Verne Vance** chaired a Blue Ribbon Commission of citizens and Aldermen examining salaries of Newton's elected officials, which concluded its business in February 2005, and as a result, the Board passed an adjustment in the Mayor's salary to keep up with inflation.

### **c. Clerk of the Board and Board staff.**

The Board has also been aided by our able City Comptroller, David Wilkinson, and also our venerable Clerk of the Board and City Clerk, Edward English, and his able colleagues on the staff: Linda Finucane, Rosalie Myers, Christine Owen, Shawna Sullivan and Melissa Hardy. I owe Ms. Sullivan a special debt because she has been my principal point of contact with the Clerk's office and has been helpful in getting together much of what you will hear tonight. Together these individuals are responsible for so much of what we do in helping communicate with colleagues and the public on behalf of the Board, assemble the docket, agendas and reports of items for the Board to consider, prepare the board orders and revised or new ordinances that result from Board action, and staff the various Board Committees.

I also should pause to recognize again that after almost 35 years of service, our City Clerk and Clerk of the Board, Edward English, is retiring at the end of this week. This is the last regular meeting of the Board of Aldermen in which he will serve as Clerk of the Board, and I think I speak for all of us in saying that it has been an honor to serve with Ed.

Under the leadership of Alderman Marcy Johnson, a Search Committee and the 2005 Board of Aldermen has made a recommendation of a successor to Mr. English, David Olson, to be formally chosen later this month, as the Charter provides, but any successor to Ed English will have big shoes to fill.

Finally, while the Clerk's staff and the Board officers serve the Board as a whole, the Board does most of its work divided into nine standing or occasional special committees, all appointed by the President at the beginning of the new term. The public may be unaware of much of the work of these committees because most of their recommendations are adopted without debate at the first call of Committee Reports at the beginning of each Board meeting. Before I outline the specific work of these committees and their leadership and staff, who organize their work and prepare their reports, it is important to note that these Committees

- recommended approval of over one hundred Mayoral and Aldermanic appointments of citizen volunteers to various advisory and regulatory Boards and Commissions; and
- reviewed over \$280 million in requested appropriations either as part of the Mayor's budget as presented or as separate items.

In total, the Board has disposed of over 460 docket items in the last year, including a number of resolutions honoring accomplishments of Newton Citizens, such as the Newton North High School Basketball and Football Teams, the Newton Symphony Orchestra, and the Gold Crown Award for the Daytime school newspaper, to name a few.

I will introduce the work of these Committees in the order in which they make reports to the Full Board under our Rules.

### **3. The Committees of the Board and their work.**

First, is the **Land Use Committee**, which makes recommendations on zoning special permits for new land development. The Committee Chairman is **George Mansfield** and the Vice-Chairman **Mitch Fischman**.

Last year the Committee dealt with over forty special permits relating to land development and reconstruction in the City, including Newton Wellesley Hospital's Expansion, new facilities at Newton's Brae Burn and Charles River Clubs, and replacement of the McDonald's on California Street, as well as other residential and commercial projects, including some rear lot subdivisions, extensions of structures that do not conform to current zoning rules, permits for wireless communications, free-standing signs, grade changes of more than three feet on a site, amended site plans and waivers of parking requirements. The Committee also worked with the Board and the Law Department to re-hear and approve a proposal that successfully settled the appeal of the prior year's denial of a permit for radio transmission towers in Oak Hill Park. In addition, the Committee completed and the Board adopted a Statement of Good Practices to guide how Aldermen should respond to contact from those interested in a special permit since in this role, aldermen act in a quasi-judicial rather than in a legislative capacity.

In the coming year, a number of major projects will be presented to and examined by the Committee, including the mixed-use proposal for Chestnut Hill Square on Route Nine and the development of condominiums on the upland portion of Kessler Woods.

The Land Use Committee is staffed principally by Linda Finucane of the Clerk's Office, Associate City Solicitor Ouida Young, and either Planning Director Michael Kruse or Chief Planner Nancy Radzevich, together with their staff planners, assigned to a specific matter, usually Alexandra Anath, as well as the City Engineer Lou Taverna and Associate City Engineer John Daghljan.

Next is the **Zoning and Planning Committee**, which writes and revises our zoning and historic ordinances. The Committee's Chairman is **Brian Yates**, who is also the Co-chair of the City's Public Buildings Preservation Task Force; the Vice-chairman is **Cheryl Lappin**.

Last year the Committee recommended amending the Landmark Ordinance to allow the landmarking of St. Bernard's Church and Rectory, the establishment of the Auburndale Historic District, rezoning the Angino Farm site from Single Residence to Public Use, accepting various conservation and preservation restrictions offered by property owners, amending the Landmark

Ordinance to prevent the demolition by neglect, and approving the appointment of the new Inspectional Services Commissioner, John Lojek. The Committee also met with him several times concerning the improvement of the functioning of the Department and asked him for a report on which provisions of the Zoning Ordinance are the most difficult to administer because of lack of clarity or of ambiguity. As a result, the Committee also is appointing a task force of citizens to respond to the concerns of the Commissioner of Inspectional Services.

This coming year, the Zoning and Planning Committee is expected to review elements of a Comprehensive Plan for the City.

The Committee is principally staffed by Linda Finucane of the Clerk's office, Assistant City Solicitor Marie Lawlor, as well as Juris Alksnitis of the Planning Department, with help from Martha Horn, Conservation Planner, on conservation issues and Lara Kritzer, Preservation Planner, on historic district issues.

The **Programs and Services Committee** looks after the Schools, our Parks, and our Library, as well as our Aldermanic Rules and staff. The Chairman is **Marcy Johnson** and the Vice-Chairman **Ted Hess-Mahan**.

Last year the Committee worked extensively on appropriations relating to the programmatic aspects of Newton's public schools, shaped an ordinance to control excess light on neighboring properties, established an off-leash dog task force, and proposed amendments to the City Charter for more flexibility when setting dates for municipal elections. This Committee also sees more appointees than any other, approving 25 of them this last year alone.

In the coming year, the Committee anticipates working on whether to recommend local voting rights for permanent resident aliens, and whether the Board of Aldermen itself should be reduced in size.

The Programs and Services Committee is staffed by Rosalie Myers of the Clerk's office, and most often, by Associate City Solicitor Gayle Smalley.

Next is the **Public Safety and Transportation Committee**, which oversees the Police and Fire Departments as well as traffic and parking ordinances. The Public Safety Committee Chairman is **Christine Samuelson** and its Vice-Chairman is **Jay Harney**.

Last year the Committee made recommendations on specific parking and traffic restrictions not otherwise disposed of by the Traffic Council, such as recent restrictions on parking in some village centers, as well as to increase taxi rates to offset the cost of rising fuel costs, to approve the appointment of new Police Chief, to update taxi licenses and public auto license, to fund bunker gear for firefighters, fire station repair and new ladder truck, and worked on additional school zone development, and to increase the fine for overnight parking of commercial vehicles.

During the next year, the Committee anticipates looking into revising the way the City's traffic ordinances are amended, traffic calming policy and street classification.

The Public Safety Committee Chairman also sits on the Newton Traffic Council, which makes recommendations to the Board about parking and traffic controls in the City. Aside from addressing over 75 specific petitions, the Council has worked on developing a new crosswalk policy, approved several neighborhood traffic improvements, and developed additional metered parking for long-term parking in Newton Centre. In the future, it is likely to examine more issues relating to parking restrictions, handicapped spaces, stop signs, and speed limits.

The Public Safety Committee is staffed by Christine Owen of the Clerk's Office, but also by Clint Schuckel, the City Traffic Engineer, David Koses, Transportation Planner, with help from Gayle Smalley and Catherine Farrell of the Law Department, and Officer Paul Bianchi and Officer Dawn Hough of the Police Department. The Traffic Council also involves Chairman Candace Havens and most often Sergeant James Norcross of the Police Department, and is staffed by Rosalie Myers of the Clerk's office.

The **Public Facilities Committee** is involved in roads, trash collection, snow plowing, water & sewer service, utility lines, and public buildings, including new or renovated schools. The Chairman of the Public Facilities Committee is **Sydra Schnipper** and the Vice-chairman, **Anthony Salvucci**.

This Committee last year reviewed over 15 grants of location for public utilities street and utility reconstruction, including laying out, grading and acceptance as a public way of Countryside Road, Mosley Road and Patten Circle, commissioning of the Newton South High School HVAC system, review of the Newton South High School Project, and passed an ordinance amendment to allow for the acceptance of new streets without sidewalks. It also passed several main drain and common sewer petitions, as well as authorized transfer of street light maintenance to the Fire Department, and the increase of fees for vendor boxes located throughout the City; as well as funding for various school building projects.

In the next year, the Committee anticipates working on the issues of construction of a new Newton North High School, raised crosswalks for traffic calming, the redesign and reconstruction of Needham and Walnut Streets, policies regarding snow clearing, and improvements to Fire Stations.

The Committee is staffed by Shawna Sullivan of the Clerk's Office, and supported in much of its work by Building Commissioner Nicholas Parnell, Public Works Commissioner Robert Rooney, City Engineer Lou Taverna and Gayle Smalley of the Newton Law Department.

Next is the **Finance Committee**, which determines if and how we can pay for it all. The Finance Committee's Chairman is **Paul Coletti** and its Vice-chairman is **Scott Lennon**.

The Committee oversees a City budget of over a quarter of a billion dollars, more than half of which is allocated to the Newton Schools, and most of which is paid by taxes on residential property. While only the Mayor can ask for an appropriation, nothing can be spent without the Board's approval. The Board's rules provide that all but small items are reviewed by the Committee with jurisdiction over a matter and then by the Finance Committee to put the various pieces together. In the interests of time, I have not included each of the budget reviews

by each of the substantive Committees, but they go on regularly throughout the year for supplemental appropriations as well as when the Mayor presents his complete budget to the Board for action in the spring. Essential to this work are the City's department heads and the School Superintendent who regularly appear before the Board Committees to explain their requests and address other matters from time to time. We appreciate all their input even if time does not permit them all to be specifically recognized tonight.

The Chairman of the Finance Committee by tradition presides over the public hearing and Committee of the Whole discussion of setting the relative share of property taxes to be paid each year by residential and commercial or industrial property, which last year the Board voted to set fiscal 2006 tax rates at \$9.36/\$1,000 of assessed valuation for residential property and \$17.73/\$1,000 for commercial/industrial properties.

In total, this year, the Board, with the Finance Committee's recommendation, approved appropriations or funding for \$278,025,044 and bond authorizations of \$14,978,905. The Board also, through its various Committees, and ultimately through the Finance Committee, reviewed and made recommendations to the Executive Department's \$192,250,399 million capital improvement program for the five year period 2006-2010.

In addition, the Finance Committee reviewed the Auditor's Report, including its management letter. The Finance Committee also oversees the Newton Pension and Retirement Funds, Workers' Compensation Trust Fund, Employee Health Insurance Trust Fund, as well as reviewing all labor and contract settlements negotiated by the Executive Department.

In the upcoming year, the Finance Committee will continue this work, including funding of upcoming Community Preservation Projects, for Newton North High School, and of course, the annual budget and Capital Improvement Plan.

The Finance Committee is staffed by Christine Owen of the Clerk's office and our able City Comptroller, David Wilkinson, as well as aided by Elizabeth Dromey of the Assessing Department, as well as Chief Administrative Officer Mike Rourke, who is himself retiring-- (We will again miss you, Mike) -- and Budget Officer Sandy Pooler, who meet regularly with this and other Committees on behalf of the Mayor on financial and other issues.

The **Real Property Reuse Committee**, which reviews sale or lease of City property. Its Chairman is **Rick Lipof**; and its Vice-chairman is **Len Gentile**.

Last year the Committee approved the transfer of the Carr School to the Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs for the use of many community programs. The Committee is staffed by Linda Finucane of the Clerk's office, Planning Director Michael Kruse and Eileen McGettigan of the Newton Law Department.

The **Post Audit and Oversight Committee** looks back to see if what has been promised has in fact been achieved. Its Chairman is **Carleton Merrill**; Vice-chairman, **Susan Albright**, and is staffed by Shawna Sullivan of the Clerk's office.



The Committee last year conducted a review of several city departments including repairs to the fire stations, a policy for the use of city vehicles for ceremonial purposes and the reconstruction of the Department Heads' parking lot at City Hall overseen by the Department of Public Works.

Finally, **The Committee on Community Preservation**, which recommends how we spend funds for open space, affordable housing, recreation and historic preservation raised by one per cent of property taxes paid in the City matched by state funds raised under the Community Preservation Act. The Committee Chairman is **Steve Linsky**; Vice-chairman, **Ken Parker**, and is staffed principally by Christine Owen of the Clerk's Office and by Jennifer Goldson of the Planning Department.

Last year the Committee recommended and the Board ultimately approved funding of approximately \$7,483,739 million for community preservation projects., including the acquisition of the city's last working farm, the ongoing preservation of the city's historic burying grounds and other public landmarks, and additional number units of community housing. In the coming year, it will be reviewing a number of applications sent along by the Community Preservation Committee, the group of citizen appointees who make the recommendations to the Board.

Also, I have appointed two special Committees last term, which continue this term.

The **Special Committee on Long Range Planning** looks at how the Board can improve its efficiency and effectiveness. Its Chairman is President Emeritus **Verne Vance** and Vice-Chairman, **Vicki Danberg**, who is absent today.

In addition, the **New High School Design Advisory Committee** provides early input into the new school. It was begun under the leadership of Alderman Verne Vance who has been succeeded as Chair by Vice-President **Amy Sangiolo**. This Committee is staffed by Shawna Sullivan of the Clerk's office, who also staffs the monthly meetings of Board Chairmen to discuss internal Board administration.

Finally, I especially want to introduce to you again our newest colleagues who show great promise themselves: **Leslie Burg**, Alderman-at-large from Ward 3, who will serve on the Zoning and Planning, Public Safety, and Post-Audit Committees and **Ben Weisbuch**, Alderman-at-large from Ward 1, who will serve on the Zoning and Planning, Public Facilities and Real Property Reuse Committees.

#### **4. Some things to come.**

During the next year, I hope that we can continue to work to spend more of our limited time on the major issues before the city and less time on the minor ones. For example, last term we changed our rules so not to require all reappointees to various boards and commissions to come in for a meeting with the relevant committee prior to the Board voting for their continued service. The Finance Committee has also worked with the Comptroller to allow small items to be taken up swiftly. That has saved time we can use to good effect in other ways.

Here are some initiatives members of the Board have mentioned to work on during the 2006-2007 term in order to build on the foundation we have already begun during this last term:

- Working with the staff of the Board and the Mayor's office to make sure that, once decisions are made, appropriate follow up occurs.
- Making our aldermanic work more visible and transparent to the public through greater use of the web and other technologies, including community television, as well as outreach through neighborhood organizations.
- Looking at ways the Board can be an effective partner with the Executive Department in the budget process to assure wise use of public funds. For example, in a project of the scale of Newton North High School, the City will need to have the resources not only to fund and to manage that project well, but also to preserve the time and attention of the key staff to attend to regular responsibilities.
- Undertaking important policy initiatives, such as reforming our zoning ordinances.

This list is not exhaustive, and we welcome other ideas for making the Board of Aldermen more efficient and effective to serve the citizens of Newton.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted, R. Lisle Baker  
President